

The Lord our Righteousness

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[0 : 00] The 23rd chapter of the book of Jeremiah. And we shall read verses 5 and 6. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely. And this is the name whereby he shall be called, the Lord, our righteousness.

And that's what we're looking at this evening, these last few words. The Lord, our righteousness. Now the setting of this chapter is a rather gloomy one, because it begins with a pronouncement of woe upon the shepherds who have neglected the sheep.

Now what is being referred to there, are the leaders of the nation of Israel, and how they have neglected to look after the people of Israel.

It would appear that the major emphasis is upon the kings of Judah and Israel. And as you read through the historical books in the Bible, you find how so many of these kings turned away from the Lord, turned away from the Jewish religion, and followed idols, and led their people astray.

[1 : 31] But we believe it's not simply to the kings, but also to the most specifically religious leaders, to the priests who should have been teaching the people the proper ways, and yet so often were led astray into idolatry.

And to the prophets as well. So often we find that the prophets taught false teaching. So instead of giving the true words that the Lord had for the people, which was so often a warning of future judgment, and a command to repent from their sins, they were presenting the idea that everything was fine, and they didn't need to worry about anything.

And we're told that these people had scattered the sheep. They had driven them away. You have scattered my flock and driven them away. But then we see that while God comes in judgment, that's what we find, that God comes and sends the people into exile because their land is overrun by enemies.

But we find then that he promises that he is going to restore them. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds, and they shall be fruitful and increase.

And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord. And central to this restoration of the people will be a very special person.

[3 : 10] For all the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the air.

And as we read these words, we must come to the conclusion, that these words refer to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who is the great king that was promised.

The one who was the fulfilment of all that the kings of Israel prefigured. And he is also the great prophet, the one who tells the truth, who speaks the truth to his people.

He is also the great priest who offers up the one and only sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself. And so he, by these different offices, will overcome the failures of the people of Judah and Israel.

So let's look then this evening at this phrase, at the end of verse 6, which is the way of which this person, Jesus Christ, is described.

[4 : 24] The Lord, our righteousness. Now we're not going to look at it strictly in terms of what understanding Jeremiah would have had, because undoubtedly, Jeremiah, in writing these words, and in speaking these words, would not understand fully what was meant by them.

He was only seeing in a glass darkly. He wasn't being able to understand to the same degree that we are. We who have the New Testament, who have the Gospels, who know what actually

happened in the years to come after that.

So we're looking at it, bringing to bear upon this phrase the words, the truth that we find in the New Testament. The fulfilment that we find of this in the New Testament.

And the first thing we notice here is the need of man. In this name, the Lord, our righteousness, is implied that man has a great need.

The Lord, our righteousness, implies that we need righteousness. Now what is righteousness?

[5 : 43] Well, in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, righteousness means conformity to a required standard. There's the idea of straightness, a straight line.

We have that idea in our own language. When we think of someone who's a criminal, we refer to them as a crook.

In other words, they're a crooked person. They're not on the straight way. They're the opposite to righteousness. And as we know, the standard of righteousness in God's Word is His law.

God is a righteous God. He is righteous in all that He is and in all that He does. And His law given to man is a reflection of that righteousness.

And so He sets the standard for man. He has a right to. He is the Creator. He is God. He has a right to set what standards He wishes. But these standards He sets are in perfect conformity with His character, with His righteousness.

[6 : 55] And these standards have to be perfectly kept. That is the problem for man. These standards have to be perfectly kept. We don't keep them perfectly.

Therefore, there is unrighteousness. And therefore, we have a lack of righteousness and it's implied here in this name that is given to this great person to come that He is the one who provides that righteousness.

And why is righteousness needed? Simply because God requires it. Any deviation from it, any deviation from His standards leads to spiritual death.

It leads to condemnation. We think of the very first thing. We think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Now, it didn't seem a very great thing that they did and yet, it was something which led to condemnation.

It led to spiritual death for themselves and for all who are descended from them. The whole human race. And we need to be righteous to please God, to glorify God.

[8 : 04] Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. We may think it was a very little sin. It wasn't really all that important that he would just eat of the fruit of that one tree. It doesn't seem to our sinful minds to be something that is very important at all.

But if we think of it in these terms, we are completely missing the point. Because the point about it was that God had set that standard and He had said to them, you must not eat of that tree.

You must not eat of the fruit of that tree at all. That is the standard that God had set and that is the standard that He required to be kept. And to go against that standard, to transgress that law that was made, is very serious indeed.

It is serious not because of so much of what is done, but because of the one against whom it is done. It is a sin against a perfectly holy God.

And when we think of it in these terms, all sin, no matter how small it may seem in our eyes, becomes very serious indeed because it is against a perfectly and awesomely holy God.

[9 : 18] And as a result of that sin, of course, man has forfeited his right to eternal life because he has lacked the necessary righteousness. Now we don't know what would have happened had Adam and Eve not sinned.

It would be a reasonable guess, although not much more than a guess, is that they would have been removed from that position of being tempted to sin to something like heaven perhaps, where they would be established forever in that righteousness.

But that's all speculation because that's not what happened. They sinned and they fell and the result was eternal punishment threatened upon mankind and because of that, man lacks the righteousness that is necessary to please God.

That's the implication that we have here in this name, the Lord, our righteousness. It implies that we don't have righteousness ourselves. Otherwise, why would we need someone else to be called the Lord, our righteousness?

That's the teaching of Scripture throughout the Bible. We have no righteousness of ourselves.

Romans chapter 3, which we read a few minutes ago, tells us that. It lists a whole series of texts

from the Old Testament which make quite clear that fact, that there is no righteousness in man, that we need someone else to provide that righteousness for us.

[10:56] And so that's the first thing we notice here, the need of mankind, the need of righteousness. But then we see secondly, the provision of righteousness.

And that righteousness is provided by God. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch.

God is going to provide this righteousness. And who is it that's spoken of here? The Lord, our righteousness, as we've already said, it is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we'll need to try and think for a minute or two of how that can be. How can we be sure of that? Well, for example, thinking of just the general teaching of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is pointing all the time to Jesus Christ. you see the sacrifices that are made. And these point to the one true sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

[12:00] You see the kings of Israel. And who are they pointing to? They're pointing to one who will rule wisely over his people. You see the prophets of the Old Testament.

And who are they pointing to? They're pointing to Jesus Christ, who is the one who speaks, who reveals the truth about God most fully. You see the priests in the Old Testament offering their sacrifices.

And you see then Jesus Christ, the great high priest who enters heaven on our behalf. Not just into a tent, as was so often the case in the Old Testament, but actually entering into the direct presence of God with the sacrifice, with his own blood as the sacrifice.

And so much of the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus Christ. And when we see an individual pointed to here, we find that maybe there may have been other forms of fulfilment, partial fulfilment. That's often the case with a prophecy in scripture. But ultimately, surely, it is pointing to Jesus Christ. But then we have specific teaching in the New Testament. Paul, when he's writing to the Corinthians, speaks of Jesus Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

[13:24] Jesus Christ who is made unto us wisdom and righteousness. Jesus Christ is our righteousness. Now, Paul was a well-educated Jew.

He knew his Old Testament. And he would know that in saying that sort of thing that people would be reminded of this verse here. And also in our reading in Romans chapter 3.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. And what is that righteousness of God? Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.

In other words, he is expanding in the phrase the Lord our righteousness referring it to Jesus Christ. So surely there can be no doubt about it that these four words mean the Lord our righteousness mean Jesus Christ.

But what does it tell us about this great provision this person who is provided? What do these words tell us? Well, they point to deity the Lord our righteousness.

[14:40] Jehovah our righteousness. Now to understand what this is referring to we have to remember that in the book of Isaiah we read this I am the Lord that is my name and my glory will I not give to another neither my praise to graven images.

I am the Lord that is my name. God's name stands for everything that he is and he will not share that glory with another and yet here as we have already seen we have a phrase referring to Jesus Christ and so we can deduce from that quite simply that the divine name is a name that is suitable for Jesus Christ.

It is given to someone who is distinct from the Lord because the Lord says I will raise a righteous branch and that person who is distinct from Jehovah is also given the name Jehovah.

In other words we have another person distinct from the one who speaks who is God who has full deity. Now when we think of these things just on this one piece of evidence does it not amaze us that we find people like Jehovah's Witnesses who deny the deity of Christ and say that Christ cannot be God.

Surely that is clearly taught here. Now we rarely if ever in the Bible find anything that says quite simply Jesus Christ is God.

[16:22] It very rarely if ever puts it as plainly as that. but with a little bit of looking under the surface of almost every page of the New Testament and many of the pages of the Old Testament

we find that Jesus Christ is God.

That Jesus Christ has full deity. And so that's the first thing we notice about this person who is the provision of God. There is deity there. But there's also humanity.

That word our is the significant word here. The Lord our righteousness. Because what is concerned here is not the righteousness of God as such but the righteousness of man.

Because it is the righteousness of man that is required for man to be saved. There has to be righteousness by man for man in the provision that is made here.

In other words the promised redeemer the promised deliverer would have to fulfil the law of God.

He would have to do what Adam and Eve and all those who are descended from them failed to do.

[17 : 34] He would have to keep the law. Remember what he said in the letter to the Galatians. But when the fullness of time was come God sent forth his son made of a woman made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now how could that happen unless the one who came took upon himself human flesh? There has to be human righteousness. Of course Jesus had the righteousness of God and his deity.

He had perfect righteousness in that sense. But he has to also have perfect righteousness as man otherwise he cannot take the place of anyone. And so we have here strongly implied that Jesus Christ had true humanity as well.

So we have here in this person the Lord of righteousness we have deity and humanity. But the main thing that we see here is that there is righteousness.

That is the main thing. He is righteous as God but he is particularly righteous as man. The Lord our righteousness. It implies that this person who is to come will have the righteousness that we lack.

[18 : 59] And we know that that was true. We know from the New Testament that Jesus fulfilled the law in its every aspect. That he was totally obedient to the will of his father. That he was totally able to keep the law down to its smallest detail.

Now let's think a little bit further about this righteousness. This obedience to the law of Jesus Christ. This conformity to the standards of God that Jesus provided.

Now you may be familiar with the distinction that is made between the active righteousness and the passive righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's a phrase that theologians use in order to distinguish two different things with regard to the righteousness of God.

the active righteousness they use to speak of his life and his keeping of the law and his passive righteousness with regard to his death and his bearing the penalty of the law upon himself.

Now these two, these ways of doing it are not perfect because remember Jesus in his life there were certain passive aspects of it. He was active in his obedience but at the same time he allowed himself to become a human being in the first place.

[20 : 19] And equally when it comes to his death we can't speak of that as being passive as if it's just all happening to him beyond his control because remember he said himself that he lays down his own life but no one can take that life away from him.

He lays down his own life. It's perhaps simpler to think of it, make this very important distinction with a different way of thinking of it.

Think of his suffering obedience and his law keeping obedience. Two very important aspects of this righteousness of Jesus Christ and both of them are necessary for us.

There's his suffering obedience first of all, let's think of that. There's his bearing the punishment of the law, taking the penalty for sin upon himself as a vitally important aspect of the work of Christ.

And that was being done in righteousness because sin must be punished. It is, God is a righteous God must punish sin and therefore in Christ that sin is punished.

[21 : 27] He bears the penalty and he suffers the penalty for sin. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 tells us, for he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.

He takes the sins of others upon himself. He takes the penalty upon himself. And how we need that, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

How we need that aspect of Christ's work, his death on the cross. We can pay the penalty for our sins. We can all do that, but there's only one place we can do that and that is in hell.

That is the only place where we can pay the penalty for our own sin. If we're going to avoid eternal punishment, we must look to the one who is our righteousness, the one who bears the penalty in our place.

And Jesus died to save sinners, to take away that. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Lord, says Paul, being made a curse for us.

[22 : 39] How we need that, how we need to believe in the Lord Jesus for that salvation. What an awesome thing it is that Jesus Christ takes upon himself. The punishment in hell that we deserve, that something equivalent to that in the eyes of God.

His suffering, obedience, vitally important. obedience. But there's also the other aspect, what we might call his law-keeping obedience. And that is just as vital.

It's just as vital to his ability to save. Jesus had to keep the law perfectly. He had to provide a righteous life in the eyes of God.

God. Just think what would have happened if Jesus had sinned once. One sin is very serious. Remember we said earlier, we might not think it's serious.

But it's against an infinitely holy God. And so that deserves the punishment of eternal destruction. If Jesus had sinned once, then we would have no saviour.

[23 : 53] Because he would have been punished in his own right. But he did not sin. His life was perfect. He was without spot and without blemish.

And that means that he fulfilled all the requirements for the sacrifices. Remember the sacrifices had to be of animals that were without any blemish at all.

And that speaks of the perfect righteousness of Jesus. His perfect law keeping obedience. And that is vital for us also.

Because we need not only our sins to be taken away, because that is not enough. Do you realise what I'm saying when I'm saying this?

It's not enough that our sins are taken away. Just let me illustrate it in this way. Imagine there's a book which contains our life, everything that we have done in our life.

[24 : 54] Now God, in his perfect righteousness, his requirement is that when he reads the book concerning our life, that he finds in it there a record of absolute and total perfect service for him.

sin. Now suppose in that book all our sins are rubbed out. Everything that we have done that is sinful is erased from this book.

The times that we lost our temper without cause, rubbed out. The times when we had evil thoughts, rubbed out. The times when we dishonoured God's day, rubbed out.

The times when we failed to give him the glory that was due to his name, rubbed out. And we rub out all these things and what's left? An empty book. Nothing there.

And God requires that that book be filled with a lifetime of service for him. You see, it's not enough to have our sins forgiven.

[26 : 02] It is the first step only. We must also have the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

And instead of the emptiness of that book, which is left when our sins are taken away, what is credited to us is the life of Catholic obedience that Jesus Christ had.

Unless we have that, we are not saved. We must have his righteousness credited to us. God looks at us as we are in Christ. That means our sins are washed away and his righteous life is credited to our account.

It's a marvellous salvation. Don't we see how it all fits together? How it meets our need perfectly?

Our sin is taken away and we are regarded as if we have lived a lifetime of perfect righteousness, a perfect provision that is made for us.

righteousness. We need righteousness. We've seen that and righteousness is provided. We've seen that as well. Righteousness is provided through Jesus Christ. The righteousness of sin taking away and the righteousness of a perfect life.

[27 : 32] But finally, let's think of the implications of that. We understand what I've been saying this evening. that Jesus Christ has provided all these things.

He is our righteousness in these different ways. That God has made a perfect provision. Let's assume that we all agree that that is the case.

That God has made this perfect provision for us. Well, let's just think of one or two aspects of the implications of that. Is there this perfect provision made?

We answer yes. Therefore, let us make sure that we link ourselves to it. Let us be sure that we link ourselves to that perfect provision.

It's not going to be automatic. We are not going to be saved if we simply sit back and do nothing. Even if we try to understand the theology of what Jesus has done.

[28 : 33] and it's a very deep subject with many different aspects to it. It's a lifetime study and more to understand the things of God with regard to Jesus Christ's work of atonement.

It's a lifetime study and we can become experts in that subject and we can know all the teaching of the Bible about it and still not be saved.

That is the alarming thing about it. What we must do is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must have faith. We are told that Abraham believed God and he credited it to him for righteousness.

How do we gain that righteousness? We gain it through faith in Jesus Christ. We trust in Jesus for salvation. Let's go back to Romans again and to these verses we read.

But now the righteousness of God without the laws manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 44] Unto all and upon all them that believe. We must believe in the Lord Jesus. that is the way we link ourselves to that work of Christ.

That is the way we can say the Lord our righteousness. I can say he is the Lord my righteousness if I have faith in him. Once again we see Paul writing to the Philippians.

that he wants to win Christ and be found in him not having my own righteousness which is of the law but that which is through the faith of Christ.

And then he reiterates it. The righteousness which is of God by faith. Now we may agree that this is marvellous teaching all this about the provision God has made but we must avail ourselves of it.

We must link ourselves to it. Are we doing that? Have we done that? Are we believing in the Lord Jesus Christ this evening? Are we trusting in him and resting in him?

[30 : 50] Do we believe that this perfect provision is made? Do we answer yes? Then let us not add to it or take away from it.

People so often do that. They add to it all sorts of do's and don'ts which are never found in scripture or they take away from it and say well I don't really need that at all.

I don't really need to trust in Jesus Christ for my salvation. I'll trust in my own works. I'll trust in my own goodness. We were thinking about that this morning. And how futile that is.

We saw that. How futile it is to trust in our own goodness because our own goodness is worthless in the eyes of God. Absolutely and utterly worthless.

It is only Christ's provision that is made. Now if we understand that Jesus is our righteousness then we must make sure we do not add to that or subtract from it.

[31 : 55] Do we agree that this perfect provision is made for us? Do we answer yes? then let us make sure that we have the highest regard for our Saviour.

Let us have the highest regard for Jesus Christ. What does Jesus mean to you this evening? What does he mean to me? What does the sign of the name of Jesus Christ mean to us?

So often he's just a character in the Bible. So often he's someone who we believe does exist but he doesn't really impinge upon our consciousness too much of the time.

But if someone truly understands this, the Lord our righteousness, if we understand what is meant by these words then our hearts will be filled with love and adoration for Jesus Christ.

What's your attitude to coming into this church this evening to worship God? Is it a nuisance to you? Is it a chore? Because if you love the Lord Jesus Christ and you understand him as being your righteousness then it's not a nuisance but a delight.

[33 : 12] How do you find seeking to live according to God's standards throughout your life? Is it a burden? Not if you love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not if you have the proper attitude to him recognising what he has done. it becomes a privilege.

Now is that our attitude? Is it showing itself increasingly in us?

It won't be perfect and it may start off at a very low level but is the progress being made is our love and adoration for Jesus Christ being strengthened? Is he precious to us?

If we understand these words surely our hearts will be filled with love and adoration for Christ. So do we believe that this perfect provision is made?

Do we answer yes to that question? Then let us be confident in Christ as well. Let us be confident in our Saviour. Not merely trusting that we will be saved from our sins by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 20] Christ. But being confident that we can trust in him for everything else in life as well. That he has done all this for us. That he has lived for us in providing the righteous life that we need and he has died for us providing the forgiveness of sins that we need.

He has done all this for us. If we believe in him then surely the rest is going to be easy for him to keep us safe in this world.

Keep us safe as believers to not let us slip away from his grasp. To not let us slip back into the kingdom of darkness again. And what an encouragement that can be to the believer.

Because the believer is so often weary in this world. It's a hard struggle. If you try to live a genuine Christian life according to God's standard it's tough.

We may think well it's not as tough as some countries in the world where you might be risking your life. We're not risking our lives. No, but there's so many temptations that there are around us.

[35 : 31] So many things that might take us away from the Lord Jesus Christ and we have to struggle against them. And we may well be tired of the fight against them.

We may be weary in the struggle. What an encouragement is it? It is to know that Christ is still our righteousness and we still are dependent upon him.

And because he has done these things he will do all the rest that is necessary. As he says in his own words in John chapter 10, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

The believer in Christ is absolutely safe. Do we believe that for ourselves? this wonderful promise is given.

The Lord our righteousness. We've seen how Jesus Christ is the one spoken of and we thought how he becomes the Lord our righteousness.

[36 : 45] Can you say that for yourself this evening? Can you say he is the Lord my righteousness? The one in whom I am trusting for everlasting life.

Let us pray. O Lord we give thanks to thee that thou didst not destroy man. Thou hast every right to destroy man because of sin because of the rebellion that we know is in our own hearts and yet thou art a merciful and gracious God.

And we give thanks to thee O Lord that thy mercy extends even to providing this marvellous salvation. We give thanks for the work of Jesus Christ.

For his perfect life. A life of perfect righteousness. And how that life is credited to his people. And we give thanks for his death on the cross.

For his death which takes away sin. for the way in which he bore the penalty of all the sins of all his people.

[38 : 01] We pray that we may respond to these words by seeking to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who do believe in him, O Lord, we ask that thou help us to pray with sincerity the disciples' prayer, Lord, increase our faith.

And may we find comfort and encouragement in that. May we find joy and peace in believing. We pray for any among us this evening who do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who may know of the righteousness that is provided and yet do not trust in him for salvation. we ask that thy mercy would be shown and that thou wouldst grant faith to them.

We pray, O Lord, that thou wouldst help each one of us gathered here to be found in thy kingdom. We pray that none of us would be left aside, that each of us would be saved.

Continue with us now, O Lord, and bless us to sing our final psalm. We ask it all in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord, our righteousness.

[39 : 29] Amen.